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# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3405

September 20, 2007

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The Honorable Patrick P. O'Carroll  
Inspector General  
Social Security Administration  
6401 Security Boulevard, Suite 300  
Baltimore, MD 21235

Dear Inspector General O'Carroll:

I am writing to ask you to investigate a disturbing problem that involves the Social Security Administration's disability program. Information provided to me by SSA officials reveals that its process for reviewing initial claims is broken, preventing hundreds of thousands of disability claimants from getting the financial help they are entitled to and desperately need to make ends meet.

Recent press reports describe chronic delays in the processing of initial Social Security disability claims and appeals cases. Reportedly, the SSA denies nearly two in three initial claims, and it will take an average of 523 days -- or some 17 months -- for the SSA to process each of the 752,000 pending appeals. In some cases, people have had to wait more than 3 years for the SSA to make a decision on the appeal!

This is so troubling because the evidence suggests that most of these disability claims are not frivolous, but are, in fact, meritorious. According to SSA staff, more than 60 percent of denied disability claims are eventually overturned on appeal.

This level of incompetence is preposterous and calls into question the criteria and process used by the SSA to evaluate these initial claims. Obviously, the current system is not working and needs an overhaul.

As Inspector General, you are responsible for, among other things, ensuring that efficiency and effectiveness exist in the administration of Social Security Administration (SSA) programs and operations. I urge you to immediately begin an investigation to identify the reason so many claims are incorrectly rejected when first received and make recommendations about what changes are needed to address this problem.

American workers pay taxes into the Social Security system that are supposed to provide some disability insurance. And yet, when they make a claim they are often wrongly denied at the very time they need help the most. Sadly, these people do not appear to be a priority for this Administration.

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Thank you in advance for investigating this matter. I look forward to hearing back from you soon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Byron L. Dorgan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Byron L. Dorgan  
U.S. Senator

BLD:ach